Ethical infrastructure: Halal and the ecology of *askesis* in Muslim Russia

Matteo (Teo) Benussi, UC Berkeley, US, and Ca' Foscari University, IT

Accepted version

Abstract

This article explores the ecology of late-modern *askesis* through the concept of 'ethical infrastructure': the array of goods, locales, technologies, procedures, and sundry pieces of equipment upon which the possibility of ethicists' striving is premised. By looking at the ethnographic case of halal living among Muslim pietists in post-Soviet Tatarstan (Russia), I advance a framework that highlights the 'profane', often unassuming or religiously unmarked, yet essential material scaffolding constituting the 'material conditions of possibility' for pious life in the lifeworld of late modernity. Halalness is conceptualised not as an inherent quality of a clearly defined set of things, but as a (sometimes complicated) relationship between humans, ethical intentionality, and infrastructurally organised habitats. Pointing beyond the case of halal, this article syncretises theories of self-cultivation, material religion, ethical consumption, and infrastructure to address current lacunas and explore fresh theoretical and methodological ground. This 'ethical infrastructure' framework enables us to conceptualise the embeddedness of contemporary ethicists in complex environments and the process by which processes of inner self-fashioning change and are changed by material worlds.

Keywords

Ethics; Infrastructure; Ecology of piety; Halal; Material religion; Late modernity

Corresponding author

Matteo (Teo) Benussi, Anthropology Department, 242 Anthropology and Art Practice Building, Berkeley CA 94720, Humanities Department, Dorsoduro 3484/D, Venice Italy 30123, mbenussi@berkeley.edu; matteo.benussi@unive.it.

Introduction: toward an ecology of late-modern piety

How do we think about the work of *askesis* in an age of consumer goods proliferation? The central problem addressed in this article is the relationship between persons invested in high-intensity ethical projects and a global environment characterised by complexity and abundance. To frame the ecology of late-modern piety movements, I advance the concept of 'ethical infrastructure' and apply it to ethnographic material pertaining to a milieu of Islamic piety in Russia's Tatarstan republic.

The focus of this article is how halal comes about in Tatarstan. Rather than framing it as an inherent quality of certain goods and commodities, my contribution argues that halalness emerges at the intersection of ethically-oriented individuals and communities, theological and juridical knowledges, and a lifeworld which is at once opulent, opaque, and infrastructurally organised. I suggest that an infrastructural dimension is inherent in the logistics of Tatarstani pietists' everyday experience and propose a conceptual pathway to its exploration. With this piece, however, I am not so much advancing a narrow theory of halal – although I certainly hope that what follows may enrich that developing strand the anthropology of Islam (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever, 2016; Yakin and Christians, 2021) – as attempting to delineate a conceptual framework for the investigation of the ecology of ethical life beyond specific confessions. By ecology I mean ethicists' relationships with material environments, manufacts, places, networks, and processes surrounding them. These relationships, as my ethnographic material will make clear, are doubly transformative: not only do such objects transform their users' subjectivities, but through their use, ethicists transform their material lifeworlds and contribute to their complexity.

This article addresses what might be described as a point of opacity at the intersection of two well-developed theoretical strands: theories of material religion, and theories of ethical cultivation (which, in religious settings, is often glossed as piety). This opacity may hinder our ability to situate late-modern ascetical movements, such as religious revivals and piety trends, in an integrated ecological framework.

To define such point of opacity, let me start by fleshing out the first theoretical strand upon which this article builds. The question of religion's relationship with things, matters, and habitats has been around for a long time in anthropology (Mauss, [1925] 2002; Rappaport, 1977; Appadurai, 1986; Morris and Leonard, 2017;) and has gained further urgency in the past two decades thanks to the 'ontological turn' (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, 2005; De la Cadena, 2010) and to 'material religion' approaches (Houtman and Meyer, 2012). Despite the internal variety of these conversations, the kind of items that lie at their heart have often shared what may be called a 'Durkheimian' characteristic: that of sacredness. The manufacts, places or substances discussed in these schools of thought may be used for activities as diverse as worship, pilgrimage, or divination, but in any case they tend to be *set apart* (Durkheim, [1912] 1995) by contact with the divine or spiritual domain. There can be no doubt that the holy is a crucial aspect of the religious experience, but this perspective carries the danger of side-lining dimensions of religion that lie beyond the 'officially sacred' (Gökarıksel, 2009),[i] such as quotidian *askesis*. An implicit divide risks being established between material items that are set apart for use in spiritually connoted activities, on the one hand, and 'profane' things whose importance proceeds from routine asceticism, on the other, with the latter remaining under-theorised.[ii]

The second paradigm concerns the work on the self under the aegis of ethical traditions. Over the last two decades, the 'ethical turn' in the anthropology of religion has foregrounded the cultivation of virtues, self-fashioning, asceticism, and piety (Faubion, 2011; Fassin, 2014; Laidlaw, 2014). This intellectual strand has encouraged fresh ways to ethnographically describe the role of (certain) things in self-cultivation, including, for example, renunciants' food (Laidlaw, 1995), the sound of sermons and the technologies conveying it (Hirschkind, 2006), modest clothing (Fadil, 2011), or 'ethical' consumption goods (Carrier and Luetchford, 2012; De Solier, 2013). On the other side of the coin, however, theoretical conversations within the ethical turn have tended to display a greater emphasis on subjectivity, textual traditions, inner life and moral dilemmas than on ethicists' embeddedness in material environments. The relations of the things (or classes of things) used in ethical life with their

users, with other things (or classes of things), and with larger, complex assemblages have remained somewhat out of focus; as have the procedural dynamics by which chunks of the material world get caught up in *askesis* projects, at once transforming and being transformed by them.

In order to dispel the theoretical opacity around the ecology of piety, I propose to turn to the anthropology of infrastructures placing it in conversation with the works of theorists who have pioneered the interface of ethicality and materiality, especially Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Paul Rabinow. In the past few years, the topic of infrastructure has gained unprecedented traction (Star, 1999; Humphrey, 2003, 2005; Simone, 2004, 2016; Anand, Gupta and Appel, 2015; Harvey and Knox, 2015; Venkatesan et al. 2016; Knox, 2017). By foregrounding the complex entanglements of infrastructural conformations, human communities and ideational processes, these studies have achieved significant advancements towards an ecosystemic understanding of modernity as a lifeworld made of interconnected assemblages, processes and systems running 'in the background'. These infrastructural scaffoldings possess distinctive enabling qualities, connecting people, technologies, capacities, resources, localities, and so forth, thereby sustaining human action in organisationally and materially ultra-dense habitats. While infrastructural formations transform those who enter into contact with them (ideally by augmenting their capabilities), through their proneness to modifications and crises they also affect the broader environments of which infrastructures are part.

At first sight, infrastructure studies might appear removed from theories of religion and ethics. While conversations on the role of infrastructure – buildings, urban architecture, etc – in the unfolding of the life of faith communities have recently been intensifying (Hoelzchen and Kirby, 2020; Kirby, 2021), most anthropological studies of infrastructure have remained within the perimeter of political economy, development, urbanism, and the anthropology of the state. However, as we shall see, *askesis*-oriented religionists are embedded in infrastructural conformations and partake in their complexity. In the pursuit of a life of piety, ethicists rely on often unobtrusive but vital 'background' material scaffoldings, which are in turn embedded in broader infrastructural formations that complicate any clear-cut distinction of sacred and profane.

My proposal is adjacent to anthropological conversations about piety, particularly Islamic piety, and capitalism-infused modernity. Scholars have investigated the nexus of Islamic piety and the marketplace through concepts such as 'economic morality' (Kuran, 1996), 'spiritual economy' (Rudnyckyj, 2009), and 'neoliberal piety' (Tobin, 2016), achieving important insights into the hopes as well as the awkwardness surroundings experiments in Islamic 'moral' economy within late modernity's 'amoral' neoliberalism (Rudnyckyj 2019: 9-16; 150-152). However, its infrastructural focus sets this project on a partly different course from these studies of Islamic capitalism. Although questions about Islam and capitalism loom large in the context of post-socialist Tatarstan,[iii] the concept of ethical infrastructure extends beyond the domain of the economic activity and foregrounds the broader material and procedural ecosystem within which halalists strive to live pious lives. Despite its different emphasis, this article nonetheless aligns with the findings of scholars of Islamic capitalism in acknowledging persistent yet generative dilemmas at the heart of the ethical life of Tatarstani Muslims.

In the remainder of this contribution,[iv] I build on Penny Harvey's definition of infrastructure as the 'material condition of possibility' of social life (2016: 1-3; Harvey, Krohn-Hansen and Nustad, 2019), and bring it to bear on the processes of *askesis* that lie at the heart of piety, or ethicised religion. By doing so, I hope to shed fresh light on ethicists' engagement with and embeddedness in the lifeworld of modernity, a lifeworld saturated with interconnected material affordances – consumer goods, complex technologies, lifestyle opportunities, and so forth – which, despite their 'profane' nature, are constantly mobilised in the pursuit of ethical goals.

Islamic *askesis* in the market economy

Let me now turn to my field site in central Russia's multi-ethnic Volga region, home to the Muslim-majority Republic of Tatarstan. Although Islam in Russia bore the brunt of antireligious campaigns during state socialism, the post-Soviet era ushered in a galaxy of transnational, scripturalist Sunni

piety trends that rapidly took root among the historically Sunni Tatars, particularly the bourgeoning urban middle classes (Benussi, 2021b). As concerns about Islamic-compliant conduct began to spread, halal business skyrocketed, and a veritable 'halal buzz' came to animate Tatarstan and its neighbouring regions. Halal, as is well known, is a term derived from Islamic jurisprudence which means 'permitted (by God)' and is opposed to *haram* which means 'forbidden'. The terminology of halal and haram became relevant for a significant number of people from all walks of life, reaching constituencies beyond the piety trends themselves – for instance, Tatarstan's many (nominally Orthodox Christian) Russians who buy halal meat products with the conviction that they guarantee better quality than their unmarked equivalents. Islamic terminology was even forced upon segments of the public whose consumption habits have very little to do with Islamic codes. In 2015, for example, in a largish Tatar-majority town, grassroots efforts to curb the circulation of alcoholic drinks resulted in the sale of alcohol being limited to one single municipality-owned liquor shop, aptly renamed *Haram*.

It is worth observing that Sunni jurisprudence features a wealth of categories, such as 'legally allowed' (*mubah*), 'mandatory' (*farz*), 'recommended' (*mustahab*) and 'discouraged' (*makruh*), or indeed *sharia*. Yet it is 'halal', a word technically denoting neutrality – this term refers to anything that is not sinful, but not commendable either – that has become so central to collective discussions about Muslimness and piety. This conceptual and terminological centrality of halal is striking. Why has this concept, and not others, become so central?[v] Of course, this question applies to a broad range of contemporary Muslim settings in which halal terminology has acquired unprecedented importance (Fischer, 2011; Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever, 2016; Yakin and Christians, 2021). However, for the Volga region this development is all the more intriguing considering that large-scale grassroots engagement with the concepts and terminology of halal/haram appears to be something of a historical novelty (Benussi, 2020; 2021b). The practice of consuming meat butchered according to Islamic rules has long existed among Tatars, and concerns over the Islamic permissibility of cultural innovations are documented in the pre-Revolutionary era, but halal terminology did not come to enjoy mass

currency beyond a niche of religious specialists until the last couple of decades. Now-commonplace concepts such as halal *retail*, halal *Expo*, halal *standards*, or halal *certification* were absent during the Imperial and Soviet periods – in fact, they would have probably puzzled even *fiqh* specialists.[vi] The blossoming of a veritable 'halal moment' in Tatarstan coincided with two transformations. The first is the spread of piety trends emphasizing an 'ethicised' take on Islam (Mahmood, 2012; cf. Laidlaw, 2014): scriptural exactitude, reflexivity, self-discipline, and the painstaking cultivation of religious virtues.[vii] The second is the region's entrance into the ecosystem of a market economy characterised by a saturation of consumer goods as well as often opaque processes of manufacturing, distribution, and information/marketing.

In this context, it can be argued that the concepts of 'halal' and 'haram' have gained traction because they resonate with post-Soviet pietists' needs and abilities to navigate the lifeworld of late capitalism while adhering to an ascetical/cultivational approach to Islam. The concepts are good to *act by*: they are used as coordinates to orient one's conduct around theological principles, cultivate ethical awareness, and assess the permissibility of one's actions in disparate areas of experience, amounting to a veritable logistic of pious living. Like their scripturally-conscious co-religionists elsewhere, Tatarstan's halalists insist that even though most people, including most secular Tatars, associate the notion of halal with food, this word in fact applies to *all spheres of life* – nutrition, finances, free time, care for the bodily self, etc. (cf. Benussi, 2021b). Accordingly, halalness (or haramness) applies to a wide range of consumables, services, spaces, activities, relations and combinations thereof. As my interlocutors told me, 'The whole form of life (*obraz zhizni*) of [committed] Muslims is regulated by the norms of halal. Halal has to do with mental activity, nutrition, professional sphere, fitness and self-care'; and 'Halal is not only food: it is a complex of rules for living (*zhiznennye pravila*) which encompasses all aspects of life'.

This logistic of piety flexibly applies to interactions with a material world saturated with manufacts, multi-scale supply lines, complex procedures, and interconnected webs of circulation. This article's Benjaminian opening line – 'the work on the self in an age of consumer good

proliferation' – is a playful gesture, but in a serious play mode: if one of Benjamin's most important lessons is that aesthetic life unfolds in concrete political-economic settings (2019: 166-167), the same is certainly also true of ethical life. Tatarstan's post-socialist transition has set in motion an array of interrelated processes: the appearance of Islamic piety movements, the emergence of an ascetically inclined middle class, and the establishment of a capitalist economy composed of nested and overlapping markets. In this setting, consumption cannot be understood as just a matter of self-expressive romantic hedonism *à la* Campbell (2018), but also as an arena and tool of self-expression through routinised ethical labour (Carrier and Luetchfort, 2012).

Making halal habitats

Tatarstan's piety milieu can be framed as an example of Weberian inner-worldly asceticism (1978: 541-544): a form of *askesis* that engages with the world rather than withdrawing from it, cultivating transcendental virtues in a variety of mundane habitats. Such inner-worldly ethical actions may have an extensive transformative effect on the environments within which pietists move. Pious commitment, however otherworldly or transcendental the goals of this project might appear (salvation, enlightenment, Paradise…), unfolds through a myriad of quotidian logistical deliberations and choices involving manufacts, substances, processes and spaces, as well as ambiences and atmospheres, that compose the infrastructural scaffolding of ethical life.

   The halal boom has indeed had a palpable effect on Tatarstan's urban landscape. The post-Soviet era has witnessed the building or restoration of mosques and other types of religiously connoted sites. But besides such 'officially sacred' locales, a whole new assemblage of consumables and establishments catering specifically to Muslim pietists has also come into being. As one interlocutor put it, 'Yes, mosques are important, but there is a lot more to halal living'. A homegrown halal industry is now going at full steam, specialising in the production of halal goods (food) and services (tourism, consultancy) and in 2008, a 'Halal Standard Committee' was established under the aegis of the state Muslim officialdom to provide expertise and control. Transnational fluxes of consumables

(cosmetics, essences, care products) from the Muslim world converge in the region. A spate of new (types of) buildings has popped up where citified Muslims aggregate for leisure, socialisation, and consumption: restaurants and cafes, fitness centres (in which, for example, gender separation rules are observed), hotels, clothes shops, beauty parlours, and financial consultancy firms. Rather than contact with the divine, this assemblage of goods, services, procedures, and places help local Muslims navigate the complexity of an opulent environment so as to bring everyday existence in line with the dictates of Islam's ethical tradition.

Some of the items composing the halal assemblage have been certified by Tatarstan's Halal Standard Committee or analogous bodies. Certification is a hotly debated issue, associated with difficult questions – Who guarantees that the certifying bodies are trustworthy? Could the 'halal' stamp be used unscrupulously? – that are particularly urgent in a scandal-prone environment such as post-socialist Russia. Other items, such as religious books and garments, might not be certified halal, but are nonetheless widely perceived as 'Islamic'. Yet others are neither certified halal nor explicitly marked as religious, but are nonetheless conducive to a functional and enjoyable Muslim life. This latter set, as we shall see in a moment, is particularly interesting as it reveals the plasticity and situational character of the concept of halal. In what follows, I will not advance a comparison between categories of items composing the halal assemblage. Instead, trying to keep close to the perspective of pietists themselves, I propose to consider *anything material* that gets caught up in halalists' labour of making and inhabiting halal ecosystems as part of their ethical infrastructure.

Let me share an example of a piece of equipment that, while hard to classify as 'Islamic', has become a component of some Tatarstani halalists' ethical habitat: bicycles. Upon learning that I was interested in the issue of halal, one of my interlocutors resolved to introduce me to his friends, a circle of young, religiously committed, theologically literate outdoors enthusiasts. To my initial disorientation, these sporting Muslims told me that if I wanted to write about halal, I should understand cycling. Being healthy, ecological and cultivational, they saw this mundane and apparently 'secular' pastime as a key element of their 'halal living'. They were not alone in

associating cycling with projects of Islamic personhood: one of Russia's most popular imams and poster boys of the new 'aspirational Muslim' generations, Shamil Alyautdinov, has often posed along with his riding gear on his social media channels. Furthermore, it should be noted that the halalness of cycling, especially for women, is a debated subject in conservative Muslim environments;[viii] for my acquaintances, it is important that 'halal cycling' be practised with certain unspoken rules, such as modesty and gender-mixing control.

This example illuminates a certain indeterminacy around the uses of halal as a concept. Everybody, including my acquaintances who, only half tongue-in-cheek, talked about 'halal bikes', would find it inappropriate to define (let alone *certify*) a bicycle, or cycling as an activity, as being halal in itself. Yet the idea of 'halal gym' is considered legitimate and indeed well-established: numerous interlocutors expressed the need for sports facilities where pietists may cultivate healthy Muslim bodies in religiously welcoming spaces free from loud music, gender-mixing and immodest clothing. In the case of Muslim-friendly gymnasiums, the definition 'halal' removes potential ambiguity, differentiating Muslim-friendly establishments from spiritually riskier ones. In themselves, however, the walls and various appurtenances composing the gymnasium are not inherently permissible or forbidden. To offer yet another example, money cannot be described, let alone branded/certified, as being halal in itself, but pietists often talk of 'halal money' referring to money earned honestly and spent or invested in pious enterprises.

These examples suggest that objects and spaces acquire an association with halalness in the context of Muslims' engagement with them. Within these engagements, branding and certifying might be the most attention-grabbing and discussed feature of contemporary halal discourses, but they represent the tip of a far greater ethical iceberg. While halal certification and branding may visibly 'chart' Muslims' patterns of engagement with their environment, they do not exhaust the complexity and nuance of these patterns, nor do they account for the ways in which uncertified, unbranded (or unbrandable) items – such as fitness equipment used in religion's name to take care of one's God-given body, religiously unmarked clothing safeguarding modesty, or money given to charity or used

in the cause of religion, etc. – become incorporated into experiments of halal living. A theoretical focus on halal as ethical infrastructure invites us to frame halalness *not as an inherent quality* of objects or spaces, but as a particular *mode of engagement* with elements of the material world.

Ethical infrastructure: a genealogy

Anthropologists working on infrastructure often focus on it as the material supports of the social, political and economic life of communities, especially as modernity makes individuals and groups increasingly dependent on interconnected technological and procedural grids. Shifting the focus to the 'material conditions of possibility' (Harvey 2016: 1-3) for *ethical* life entails a slight expansion of our framing of infrastructure, but is hardly an unprecedented move. My proposal is indebted to a range of anthropological contributions on the material dimension of ethical life. Caroline Humphrey, for example, has described architecture as a 'jumping-off point for human freedom of reflection' (2003: 43). Charles Hirschkind's pioneering work on 'ethical soundscapes' (2006) has shown how aural technologies influence urban landscapes and religiously connoted human conduct therein. Douglas Rogers' concept of 'material of ethics' (2009: 15-16), pertaining to the 'kind of objects, substances, rituals and speech acts [that] populate the […] field of ethics', has much in common with the framework I am developing here, although it has not been further developed. No less inspiring is Webb Keane's idea of 'ethical affordance' (2016: 27), that is, 'any aspects of people's experiences and perceptions that they might draw on in the process of making ethical evaluations and decisions, whether consciously or not'. Recently, Daromir Rudnyckyj has offered a sophisticated investigation of Islamic financial infrastructures (2019), while the 'phenomenological' school of the anthropology of morality has advanced robust theorisations of world-building (Zigon, 2018, 2019) and immanence (Mattingly et al. 2018) in moral life – albeit without systematically discussing religious asceticism.[ix]

In addition to these works, the concept of ethical infrastructure draws on a trajectory of philosophical reflection on the interface of subject (self-) making, technology and materiality at the core of which lie the notions of *apparatus* and *equipment*. Michel Foucault has pioneered this

approach by foregrounding the material, spatial and indeed infrastructural (though he does not emphasise this term) dimensions of power through studies of governmental/economic institutions, prisons and hospitals (1991, 1995, 2003). While in this earlier phase, the Foucauldian subject was at the receiving end of heteronomous projects of collective moulding (the forging of populations), a subsequent phase of the philosopher's work was marked by a shift in emphasis to autonomous subject-making and 'technologies on the self' (Foucault, 1988). The material/infrastructural *sensu stricto* is perhaps less prominent in the second phase of Foucault's oeuvre, given that technologies of the self, despite exerting their transformative power on bodies, appear to be prominently ideational and discursive; however, it should be noted that Foucault takes pains to emphasise that technologies of the self do not function separately from those technologies of production, power and signification that occupy a central position in his previous work (Foucault, 1988: 18). Furthermore, said technologies are often embedded in concrete material worlds such as the cloister or the gymnasium.

A crucial notion that sits at the conceptual juncture of the 'infrastructural' and 'ethical' strands of Foucault's work is that of apparatus. Although the word itself, like the French original *dispositif*, retains a thick aura of materiality, this term as used by Foucault seems to apply primarily, although not exclusively, to *discursive* (linguistic) objects that 'at a given historical moment [have] as [their] major function the response to an urgency' (1980: 194). Elaborating on this oracular, but generative, definition, Giorgio Agamben has adopted a more robustly materialist framing of apparatus: 'literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions […] of living beings' (2009: 14). In Agamben's understanding of apparatus, technologies and tools such as pens or cell phones assume a central role. He argues that such material implements are no less decisive than institutions and ideologies in turning 'living beings' into subjects. Inasmuch as Agamben's definition of the subject remains heavily indebted to the early Foucault of discipline, control and heteronomy, his characterisation of the subjectifying encounter between humans and apparatuses is imagined as a traumatic one: a 'fight', albeit not necessarily an overt one.[x] Yet if we approach the concept of apparatus from an *askesis*

angle, some of the verbs listed by Agamben acquire a less concerning tinge. Individuals who embark on projects of self-formation relentlessly engage with tools and material items to 'orient, determine and secure' their 'gestures, behaviours, and opinions' – but this, rather than being the result of external imposition, is a move to achieve the desired form of subjecthood that these 'living beings' strive towards (Mahmood, 2012).

While Paul Rabinow's notion of 'equipment' also builds on Foucault, it departs from the French philosopher in important ways. Through this concept, Rabinow has moved past Foucault's emphasis on 'control and management' (2003: 50) and has, at the same time, built a bridge between the French thinker's early (idiosyncratically) materialist philosophy of power structures and his subsequent works on the care of the self. Rabinow's equipment, described as an 'arsenal […] required to take care of the self', falls squarely in the domain of *logos* or 'reasoned discourse' (2003: 6). However, '[t]hese "true discourses", these '*logoi*', [are] neither abstractions nor […] "merely discursive". They [have] their own materiality, their own concreteness, their own consistency' (2003: 10). Here, Rabinow is pointing directly at the point of intersection where discursive practices, technologies of self-formation ('*Bildung*') and material environments merge into each other – to form the actionable apparatus around ethical forms-of-life which I call ethical infrastructure. This development had already been contained, *in nuce*, in Rabinow's previous analysis of the 'socio-technical environment' of European modernity, in which attention is given to the more-than-phonetic proximity between '*plan de ville* (city plan) [and] *plan de vie* (life plan)', i.e. the correspondence between modern urban layouts and moral reform projects (1995: 343). Rabinow's subsequent work further clarifies that equipment encompasses 'all those elements (spatial, social, psychological, architectural, hygienic, etc.) that contributed to shaping an individual life' (2003: 11). The relevance of Rabinow's reflections to the argument I am developing here cannot be stressed enough. Ethical infrastructures, while material, are deeply enmeshed in a web of *logoi*/reasoned discourses: halal infrastructure would not exist without Islamic virtue, *fiqh*, DNA analysis, bureaucratic procedures, as well as discourses on trust, quality and consumer satisfaction.

As a concept, ethical infrastructure exists in conversation with the oeuvres of the thinkers above. Ethical infrastructure extends affordances for reflexive, teleological conduct. As Foucault would have it, ethical infrastructure possesses historicity: it comes into being in response to an urgency – in the case of Tatarstan's halal infrastructure, to the existential needs of an emerging piety-oriented Muslim urban middle class, unprecedentedly globally connected and endowed with purchasing power. As Agamben has illustrated, ethical infrastructure arises from the encounter (which, however, is not necessarily a 'fight') between living beings and *dispositifs*: its *raison d'etre* lies in its ability to transform – 'orient, determine, and secure'– human subjects, such as Muslim pietists in search of salvation. Ethical infrastructure fills the worlds of inner-worldly ascetics in the pursuit of what Rabinow called *Bildung*; it is this world's transformative materiality. Even without embracing an explicitly infrastructural or ecological paradigm, these authors have cast light on the point of contact between 'inner' subject formation and 'outer' material assemblages, thereby foreshadowing an ethical ecology of modernity.

Equipment for piety: thinking halal infrastructurally

Since, unlike other types of infrastructure, the 'inner' component is so central to it, ethical infrastructure exists to the extent that people use it: consumables, places, technologies are part of it inasmuch as ethicists engage with them in the context of the individual or collective pursuit of *askesis* in everyday experience. A religiously connoted or even 'sacred' object that is not used as equipment in contexts of piety – such as, say, a Quran that is never read or is only consulted by an irreligious academic for research purposes – would hardly be part of ethical infrastructure.

Ethical infrastructure exists (partly) because modern ethicists *think infrastructurally* (Chu, 2014). To be more precise: this term captures the extent to which the ethical life of late-modern pietists unfolds in a world that is infrastructurally organised, featuring multi-scale dynamics, auditing processes, mass production and circulation of goods, information and knowledge – aspects that Larkin has described as modernity's pervasive and routinised 'technical systems' (2013: 330; cf. Rudnyckyj

2019). Tatarstani halalists' distinctly modernist mindset combines a 'Weberian' systematic religiosity (2005 [1930]) with first-hand familiarity with neoliberal organisation models, their complexities and their vulnerabilities. Their ethical equipment extends across space, time and scale, and their moral deliberations extend to auditing procedures and bodies (halal certification), financial subtleties (tracking the permutations of capital to ascertain the Islamic lawfulness of its sources) and multi-local operations (manufacturing, import-export, capillary retail/distribution of halal consumables). This infrastructure assembles a variety of levels – objectual (consumables, food, substances, spaces), technological-logistical (production, supply, retail, auditing), as well informational (standards, classification systems, certification, advertisement). Each of these levels collapses discursive and material dimensions.

Ethical infrastructure has a striking capacity for growing in complexity and connectedness in accordance with the expanding of the ethical needs, concerns and awareness of its users. In Tatarstan, for example, the halal assemblage began with the food industry but later came to encompass many other categories of consumables and services. During my fieldwork (2014-15), many respondents lamented the underdeveloped state of Russia's Islamic banking infrastructure: what is the point in trying to keep your consumption halal if the money with which you purchase halal stuff moves through banking institutions involved, like all mainstream banking, in Islamically impermissible practices? (To complicate things, scholars of Islamic banking have pointed out that Islamic banking exists within a secular financial sphere which in turn would need to be 'halalified', to be fully compliant with Islamic tenets.) Once established, ethical infrastructure ends to exist as a background feature of Muslim life, which does not need to be treated with special reverence. Like other types of infrastructure (Star, 1999: 382; Humphrey, 2003), it becomes noticeable when it breaks down: when a fraud or miscertification scandal occurs (Serrano, 2020), or when it is deliberately disrupted by external forces (Erie, 2018, see below).

Anthropologists working on infrastructure have recognised that infrastructure has sensuous, aesthetic and affective dimensions (Larkin, 2013; Knox, 2017; Venkatesan et al., 2016). This is also

true of ethical infrastructure (Engelke, 2012).[xi] The knowledge of being in an Islam-compliant environment, thanks to the presence of halal infrastructure, generates feelings of ease and familiarity among Muslim pietists. For instance, to describe this feeling of peace of mind and comfort, one interviewee described a halal café in Kazan as *khalyal'nenko*, an Arabic-Russian compound which means something like 'cosily, quaintly halal', or Islamically welcoming (cf. Benussi, 2021a). Another interlocutor shared with me his dream to open a halal gym in his mid-size industrial town in eastern Tatarstan: a space for local Muslims to 'feel comfortable' while training, characterised by the presence of additional ethical equipment in the background, complementing workout equipment: subdued ambient/instrumental music, decorations without lifelike representations, gender regulation, halal-certified snacks, and, ideally, a dedicated space for prayer. My interlocutors' emphasis on the importance for Muslim pietists of achieving an emotional tone of relaxed tranquillity in carrying out everyday activities suggests that ethical infrastructure is an assemblage of features that guarantees a 'moral mood' (Throop 2014) of *peace of mind* for committed halalists.

In the case of halal in Tatarstan, the presence of ethical infrastructure is manifested at the informational level through a sign – the halal logo. Signposting is undoubtedly important to alert intended users: however, we have seen that the halal ethical infrastructure is not limited to that which carries or may carry a logo or certification, but depends on how objects are used and with what intentionality. Methodologically speaking, students of halal (or, for that matter, any other forms of ethical consumption/materiality) have as much to learn from observing what happens *around* what is marked, *before* and *after* the marking – by looking at any components, technologies, procedures, capital, deliberations, networks, disagreements caught up in the process – than they do from focusing on the mark itself.

The fact that ethical infrastructure springs into being on account of human intentionality, as a 'response' (Rabinow 2003: 54) to the historical problem of the ethical needs of a critical number of community members, has two noteworthy implications. First, societies that are not traversing a phase in which special emphasis is given to asceticism may not necessarily generate this kind of equipment,

or at least not to the same extent as *askesis*-oriented communities. So-called 'traditional' societies may rely more heavily on other kinds of material and spatial resources, which could perhaps be labelled as 'devotional' rather than ethical (thaumaturgical paraphernalia, holy sites, mausoleums and so forth) and need not be as infrastructurally organised as late-modern halal assemblages. Tellingly, devotional materials such as amulets, shrines and the like are not very relevant to post-Soviet Muslim pietists, who tend to view devotionalism with suspicion.

It is interesting to observe that, during my fieldwork, some interlocutors contrasted the high development of halal infrastructure in Tatarstan with the relatively low development thereof in other Muslim-majority areas of the ex-USSR, especially rural Central Asia. One interviewee, a Tatar imam who studied in Uzbekistan and is well connected to Kazakh networks, claimed that although Central Asian villagers tend to be, on the whole, more devout than the 'Russified' Tatars, people from these areas are often less alert to the 'subtleties' (*tonkosti*) of halal.[xii] Studies of religion in small-town Central Asia have indeed documented a preponderance of 'low intensity' devotionalism, rife with ambiguities and accommodations over scriptural observance and asceticism (Rasanayagam 2011; Montgomery 2016; Pelkmans 2017). However, recent scholarship suggests that a halal infrastructure is developing in Central Asia too, concomitantly with the consolidation of an ascetically-inclined bourgeoisie in the region's urban centres (Biard 2018). Beyond the former Soviet space, scholars have observed the role of middle-class asceticism and heightened scriptural awareness in the historical making of modern halal hubs such as Indonesia and Malaysia (Rudnyckyj 2019; Burhanudin, 2021; Hasyim, 2021) or Turkey (Lever & Anil, 2016).

Second, emphasising the fact that ethical infrastructure is predicated upon humans' intentionality allows me to distance the concept of ethical infrastructure from post-humanist approaches in which human and non-human actants are placed on the same 'flat' ontological footing (Latour, 2005; Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, 2005; Bosco, 2006, Harman, 2014), a strand of literature that despite its many merits has scarce applicability to the case at hand. There is no doubt that halal assemblages have a transformative power, but that transformative power is bestowed upon them by human striving:

to paraphrase Walter Benjamin once again, to use an object in an ascetical project means '*to invest it with the ability to transform us in return*' (2019 [1968]): 141; cf. Zigon, 2017: 60-61 for a comparable critique). The agency of such an object should not be denied, but recognised as emerging from an encounter with an ethical community – a historical fact.

Brittle infrastructure: dilemmas of halal certification

'The same individual, the same substance, can be the place of multiple processes of subjectification. […] The boundless growth of apparatuses in our time corresponds to the equally extreme proliferation in processes of subjectification' (Agamben, 2009: 14-15). Agamben's argument flows just as well if one substitutes apparatuses with ethical infrastructure. This extreme multiplicity in the field of ethics translates into a thicket of ambiguity when it comes to material infrastructure.

Engaging with life according to a *plan de vie* does not, of course, remove all messiness from life (though it might help one find a way through the mess). A vast anthropological literature has shed light on the doubts, inconsistencies and fragilities that haunt ethical life (Lambek, 2010; Schielke, 2015; but see Fadil and Fernando, 2015, for an important critique). In advancing the notion of 'ethical infrastructure', I do not presume an unfailingly orderly, fixed, universally agreed-upon grid, but rather an ever-changing, flexible, fuzzy assemblage. Of course, there are limits to the elasticity of a 'logistic of living' – Islamic piety – that stably rests on scriptural sources. But where exactly those limits lie is subject to context-specific deliberations and debates. If ethical infrastructure originates at the intersection of material worlds and ethical life, it follows that all the headaches, quandaries, and disagreements inherent in the latter manifest themselves in the fuzziness of ethical infrastructure itself. Let us take halal certification. The whole point of it is to guarantee that something is stably, unambiguously halal. However, this operation is rife with difficulties. They are not merely technical (ensuring that a product is completely alcohol-free, or that a meat factory is rigorous in applying *dhabihah* methods, etc.), but in some cases ontological, and in other political.

When it comes to determining or claiming halalness, at least five sources of indeterminateness can be identified:

a) What is the legitimate applicability scope for the concept of halal? Let us take the discussion, that I have witnessed among some Tatarstani halalists, over the certification of items such as water or eggs. From a *fiqh* angle, these foods are indeed 'permissible' and therefore certifiable as such; however, several interlocutors expressed the suspicion that in such cases halal branding is redundant, an insincere commercial gimmick to milk anxious Muslim consumers: such a use of the halal logo, although juridically acceptable, would be morally unsound, and hence not *really* juridically acceptable. Others retort that water or eggs might *not* be halal if, say, they contained harmful elements, pollutants, etc. In another case, a Tatar-run home tools company advertised its paintbrushes as halal on the grounds that they are not made with pig bristles. The item was regularly certified by an official Russian Islamic institution, following the example of Malaysia-issued guidelines that apply to non-edibles. This move, however, raised eyebrows in some quarters. Theologically literate voices (both inside and outside Tatarstan) contend that the Quranic prohibition against *eating* pork does not apply to non-edibles. Other Islamic ethicists, however, claim that pigs are entirely impure and the cautionary principle of avoiding contact with potentially polluting substances applies to their bristles as well. In an ambiguous case like this, many ethically conscious Muslim hobbyists and workers will privilege halal paintbrushes for their peace of mind. For a third scenario, let us return to fitness equipment or riding gear. In such cases, the nature of the object makes the prospect of halal branding entirely implausible. But then again, as we have seen, a bicycle can be seen as a valuable tool for halal-compliant self-cultivation – arguably, indeed, more so than a paintbrush. It is no wonder that my sporting respondents should talk about 'halal bikes', only half tongue-in-cheek. A *stolen* bike, however, would unequivocally be 'haram' (see below).

b) Whose authority applies? Different juridical traditions exist in Islam, and there are differences in how halalness is determined. Historically, Tatars have followed Hanafi *fiqh*. However, Tatarstan's Halal Committee works closely with Malaysian halal specialists who follow Shafi'i jurisprudence.

Furthermore, Salafi teaching, generally closer to Hanbali *fiqh*, have gained popularity in the region in the post-Soviet era. This opens the door to a measure of indeterminacy in the halal infrastructure: for example, Hanafism forbids certain seafoods, while the other juridical schools do not. Faced with this indeterminacy, some actors imagine juridical localism as being desirable: as one Tatar halal specialist told me, 'We [Tatars, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, etc.] and the South-East Asians don't share the same mentality. I think we should join forces and create one single certification system for the whole post-Soviet space'. Other people accept the authority of Malaysian experts and the necessity of a pan-ummic infrastructure of halal certification. Another Halal Committee executive explained how deliberations in South-East Asia reverberate globally, for instance in matters of mechanical slaughtering, and that local bodies tend to conform to these oscillations. Things are further complicated by the difficulties involved in establishing the authority of *fiqh* vis-à-vis that of local tradition. In recent years, for example, fermented mare milk *kumys* and the grains-derived beverage *buza/bozo*, considered 'national' drinks among Central Eurasian Muslim populations, have raised concerns owing to the possible presence of alcohol in the brew. However, only rarely have explicit bans been issued: religious authorities have mostly encouraged caution instead. Similarly, horsemeat is considered a delicacy in Central Eurasia, including Tatarstan, and is regularly sold and certified as halal. But Hanafi *fiqh* considers horsemeat *makruh*: not unlawful, but reprehensible. Nonetheless, no active effort has been made by Tatarstan's halal watchdogs to actually discourage the consumption of horsemeat. In sum, when potential frictions emerge between custom and jurisprudence or between different bodies of knowledge and classification systems, cautious pragmatism prevails at the leadership level. This affords consumers a significant amount of leeway in 'building' their halal infrastructure *from the bottom up* by making independent juridically-informed choices. As a result, ethical infrastructure is kaleidoscopic rather than monolithic.

   c) What if haram sneaks back in? As is clear by now, the fact that something is certified halal does not necessarily make it permissible in the eyes of juridically sophisticated Muslims. Theology-minded interlocutors point out that a halal good purchased with illegitimately-gotten money (or a stolen

bicycle) would *ipso facto* become haram: in principle, it makes no sense to buy halal unless one is 100% sure that one's source of income is Islamically permissible (in the context of Islamic financial infrastructure, this has led to attempts to erect 'firewalls' between halal banking circuits and 'conventional' ones, with mixed results: see Rudnyckyj 2019). The problem is that in post-socialist Russia, this is easier said than done. Most of my Tatar Muslim business interlocutors admit that keeping one's bank account haram-free is maddeningly difficult (Benussi, 2021b; cf. Kaliszewska, 2020 for a Dagestani perspective). And the consumption side of things is no less riddled with traps: in 2019, a döner place opened in the centre of Kazan in which Turkish-style halal meals are served alongside a sportsbook counter. Customers are invited to bet on sports, which is an openly un-Islamic activity (all gambling is haram), in the same location where they eat ethically. Are devout Muslims even allowed to enter such a place? Different people have different attitudes, and in some cases, the time passed since one's last meal plays a key role in making the decision.

d) Who can be trusted? Several of my interlocutors have reservations about homegrown official certifying bodies, an attitude seemingly justified by the numerous scandals that have plagued Russia's halalosphere (Serrano, 2020). This attitude of distrust is exacerbated by corruption issues and the perceived unreliability of institutions (both secular and religious) in the country. It must be emphasised that if consumers are suspicious of institutional halal watchdogs, people *within* these institutions are aware of their ambiguous standing in the eyes of their co-religionists, and in turn harbour suspicions toward certification applicants and would-be halal businesses in general. During my research, interlocutors in Tatarstan's Halal Committee often lamented the scourge of unscrupulous producers who apply for certification to tap into the Muslim market only to skimp on halal requirements immediately afterwards, or who put Arabic-like fonts on packages to mislead buyers into thinking their products are halal, or use the faux brand *salih* ('wholesome' in Arabic) in lieu of *halal* for marketing purposes, or use other such tricks. During my fieldwork, discussions on how to enhance trust in such a complex and wild market environment were endless. Some proposals envisioned making the halal infrastructure dependent upon existing bureaucratic structures, such as

the official Islamic clergy. One interlocutor declared that 'What is needed is a system of affidavits issued by local mullahs, imams, *khatibs* [in Russia, mosque community heads], whatnot, stating: 'I've been at firm X and witnessed that Ibrahim Ibrahimovich slaughters his animals the right way', bearing a stamp and a telephone number'. Another invoked the powers of the state's repressive apparatus: 'We should make counterfeiting halal a penal infraction (*ugolovnoe*). Something serious, that leads to incarceration. We might manage to do so by invoking the principle that it amounts to insulting religious feelings'. It bears stressing, however, that neither the reputation of the official clergy nor that of the secular institutions are spotless in the eyes of rank-and-file halalists. While no hard-and-fast solution to the issue of mistrust seems to be forthcoming any time soon, other interlocutors reasoned that halal awareness was lacking among the majority of Tatar nonpietists, and the problem must be addressed at a grassroots level.

e) The question of trust leads us to a further point: who controls ethical infrastructure? Can it be manipulated or thwarted by external forces? We have often mentioned the logistical function of this infrastructural scaffolding. In some contexts, there have been attempts to undermine ethical scaffolding in the hope of collapsing entire ethical edifices. In parts of China, for example, state forces have sought to curb manifestations of Islamic piety by targeting halal as a concept and practice, with the support of nationalistically-inclined segments of the public (Erie, 2018). Yet even when ethical infrastructure flourishes, concerns can be raised over the political-economic terms in which it is allowed to do so. In late modernity, alongside the state and its ambivalent potential as either the destructor or the guarantor of Muslims' ethical infrastructure, the halal assemblage is profoundly affected by the dynamics of capitalist production (Kuran 1996). A matter of concern, in view of this observation, is the extent to which capitalism's influence over ethical infrastructures risks converting the latter into Agambenian apparatuses turning ethical strivers into yet another version of the commodity-spellbound, pliable, hedonistic neoliberal subject (Rudnyckyj 2009; Tiqqun 2011).

There is currently no answer to these quandaries, nor, do I believe, could there ever be one (even, I suspect, if Islamic social utopias were to be realised). All these fault lines exist because halalness is

not just a quality of things themselves. Rather, halalness emerges infrastructurally from a relationship between persons, ethical projects and the material world. A degree of ambiguity is inherent in halal ethical equipment because ethical life is by necessity made up of dilemmas, rejections, compromises and debates *as well as* of certainties and long-term fidelities, without which there would be no recognisable ethical forms-of-life to speak of. In other words, the very fact that an Islamic regime of deliberation exists in the Volga region means that there is a thriving ethical community shaped by a trajectory of mundane asceticism, and this generates an imprint on the material world. Hence the fact that Tatarstan's halal assemblage is brittle at the edges and contentious is not necessarily a critical symptom: it is in the nature of ethics to be messy and rife with headaches (Benussi, 2021b; Lambek, 2015: 23; Rudnyckyj 2019: 86). What counts is that this kaleidoscopic multiformity can be reincapsulated within the overall unitarian commitment to Islam that holds the piety milieu together.

Conclusion

Let me now return to this article's opening problem: how to reorient our theoretical apparatus on ethicised religion to capture the ecology of everyday asceticism in settings characterised by material abundance and complexity. Taking halal as a particularly revealing instantiation of that question, I have discussed how, in the Volga region, the post-Soviet era has ushered in both a consumerism-based lifeworld and an *askesis*-inclined Muslim middle class in need of infrastructural equipment to orient itself and maintain peace of mind amid unprecedented complexity and opulence. This infrastructure's *raison d'etre* is not to manifest the 'sacred', but to facilitate the routine unfolding of pious conduct in an ecosystem saturated by consumables, lifestyle opportunities, translocal and transnational fluxes, etc., which in turn get caught up in halalists' pursuit of *askesis*.

Goods, spaces, procedures and services deemed, through deliberation, to be Islamically permissible make up this infrastructure. Halal-marked items are an important part of this picture but do not exhaust it. Signposting strategies at the informational level (branding, certification) make visible the capillary intertwinement of piety, urban environments, and consumption patterns.

However, halalness is not an ontologically stable quality of discrete objects or classes of objects that can be singled out, but the outcome of the relationship between a human community, its ethical project, and a physical lifeworld constantly modified in order to enable/facilitate *askesis*. Inasmuch as this relationship is ever-unfolding, halal infrastructure is necessarily equivocal and kaleidoscopic. I have described this as its normal state: it is precisely the deliberations around the halal concept that lend stability to this infrastructure, but as deliberation entails disagreement and doubt, stability and fragmentation are always-already interwoven.

Although my focus has been on Islamic piety, this contribution has attempted to achieve more than a narrowly confessional theory of halal. More ambitiously, but also more open-endedly, through the concept of ethical infrastructure this article invites readers to think 'ecologically' about *askesis* in general, so as to imagine innovative theoretical and methodological questions: what is materially and logistically needed in the pursuit of self-cultivation? What kinds of materials, technologies and spaces get caught up in ethical projects and used as actionable ethical tools? What transformations and recombinations do they undergo? What makes them ethically actionable? How do religious and non-religious things and technologies get reassembled in the service of pietists? How does *askesis* change habitats, and how do the complexity and material saturation of modern ecosystems affect *askesis*? In advancing the concept of ethical infrastructure, I do not envision it as a replacement, but as an addition to the rich theoretical toolbox for the anthropological investigation of religion and morality. I am convinced that in late modernity, an age of unprecedented anthropotechnical proliferation (Rabinow, 2003; Sloterdijk, 2013), the notion of ethical infrastructure may find broad applicability or, at least, kindle novel conversations at the intersection of multiple theoretical strands.

Acknowledgements

Funding statement

Bibliography

Agamben G (2009) *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agrama H (2012) *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Anand N, Gupta A and Appel H (2015) *The Promise of Infrastructure*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Appadurai A (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bekkin R (2015) *Shariat dlya tebya. Dialogi o musul'manskom prave*. Kazan: Smena.

Benjamin W (2019 [1968]) *Illuminations*, Boston/New York: Mariner Books.

Benussi M (2019) "Sovereign" Islam and Tatar "Aqīdah": Normative Religious Narratives and Grassroots Criticism amongst Tatarstan's Muslims. *Contemporary Islam* 14: 111-134.

Benussi M (2020) Public Spaces and Inner Worlds: Emplaced Askesis and Architecture of the Soul among Tatarstani Muslims. *Ethnicities* 20(4): 685-707.

Benussi M (2021a) Pietaskscapes of Halal Living: Subjectivity, Striving, and Space-Making in Muslim Russia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44(10): 1821-1843.

Benussi M (2021b) Living Halal in the Volga Region: Lifestyle and Civil Society Opportunities. In: Christians L.-L., and Yakin A.U. (eds.) *Rethinking Halal: Genealogy, Current Trends, and New Interpretations* (265-293). Leiden: Brill.

Bergeaud-Blackler F, Fischer J and Lever J (eds.) (2016) *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics and Markets in Global Perspective* (38-54), London/New York: Routledge.

Bezhan F (2019) Women Banned from Cycling in Bike-Friendly Iranian City. *Radio Free Europe* (18/05/2019).

Biard A (2018) "Bourgeois" Islam, Prosperity Theology and Ethics in Muslim Eurasia. *Central Asia Program* paper 198: 1-4.

Bosco F (2006) Actor-Network Theory, Networks, and Relational Geographies. In: Aitken S and Valentine G (eds.) *Approaches to Human Geographies: Philosophies, Theories, People and Practices* (140-160). Los Angeles/London: Sage.

Burhanudin J (2021) Halal Practices at the Dawn of Southeast Asian Modernity: Some Cases of Halal Fatwa in al-Manār in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. In: Yakin A and Christians LL (eds.) *Rethinking Halal: Genealogy, Current Trends, and New Interpretations* (56-79). Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Carrier J, Luetchford PG (eds.) (2012) *Ethical Consumption. Social Value and Economic Practice*. Oxford/New York: Berghahn.

Chu J (2014) When Infrastructures Attack: The Workings of Disrepair in China. *American Ethnologist* 41(2), 351-367.

De la Cadena M (2010) Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond 'Politics'. *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2): 334–370.

De Solier I (ed.) (2013) *Food and the Self: Consumption, Production and Material Culture*. London: Bloomsbury.

Durkheim E (1995 [1912]) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. London/New York: Free Press.

Engelke M (2012) Angels in Swindon: Public religion and ambient faith in England. *American Ethnologist* 39(1), 155-170.

Erie M (2018) Shari'a as Taboo of Modern Law: Halal Food, Islamophobia, and China. *Journal of Law and Religion* 33(3), 390-240.

Fadil N (2011) Not-/unveiling as an ethical practice. *Feminist Review* 98: 83-109.

Fadil N and Fernando M (2015) Rediscovering the "everyday" Muslim: Notes on an anthropological divide. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2): 59–88.

Fassin D (2014) The ethical turn in anthropology: Promises and uncertainties. *HAU: Journal of Anthropological Theory* 4(1): 429-435.

Faubion J (2011) *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Fischer J (2011) *The Halal Frontier. Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault M (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault M (1988) Technologies of the Self. In: Martin L, Gutman H and Hutton P (eds.) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (16-49). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Foucault M (1991) *Governmentality.* In: Burchell G, Gordon C, and Miller P (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault M (1995) *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*. London: Vintage Books.

Foucault M (2003) *The Birth of the Clinic*. London/New York: Routledge.

Gabdrafikova LR (2013) *Povsednevnaya zhizn' gorodskikh tatar v usloviyakh burzhuaznykh preobrazovanii vtoroy poloviny XIX − nachala XX veka*. Kazan: Akademia Nauk.

Gökarıksel B (2007) *A Feminist Geography of Veiling. Gender, Class, and Religion in the Making of Modern Subjects and Public Spaces in Istanbul*. In: Morin KM and Guelke JK (eds.) *Women, Religion & Space. Global Perspectives on Gender and Space* (61-80). Syracuse (NY): Syracuse University Press.

Hallaq W (2013) *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Harman G (2014) *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political*. London: Pluto Press.

Harvey P (2016) Introduction. In: Venkatesan S, Bear L, Harvey P, Lazar L, Rival L, and Simone A, Attention to infrastructure offers a welcome reconfiguration of anthropological approaches to the political. *Critique of Anthropology* (GDAT Meeting).

Harvey P and Knox H (2015) *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Harvey P, Krohn-Hansen C and Nustad K (2019) Introduction. In: Harvey P, Krohn-Hansen C and Nustad K (eds.), *Anthropos and the Material* (1-31). Durham: Duke University Press.

Hasyim S (2021) Halal Issues, Ijtihād, and Fatwa-Making in Indonesia and Malaysia. In Yakin A Christians and LL (eds.) 2021. *Rethinking Halal: Genealogy, Current Trends, and New Interpretations* (80-107). Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Henare A, Holbraad M, and Wastell S (eds.) (2006) *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*. London/New York: Routledge.

Hirschkind C (2006) *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hoelzchen Y and Kirby B (2020) 'Introduction: Conceptualising Religious Infrastructures', *Conceptualising Religious Infrastructures*, Frobenius Institute, Goethe University Frankfurt, 24 September 2020.

Houtman D and Meyer B (eds.) (2012) *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Humphrey C (2003) Rethinking Infrastructure: Siberian Cities and the Great Freeze of January 2001. In: Schneider J and Susser I (eds.), *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World* (91-107). Oxford: Berg.

Humphrey C (2005) Ideology in Infrastructure: Architecture and Soviet imagination. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11: 39–58.

Kaliszewska I (2020) Halal Landscapes of Dagestani Entrepreneurs in Makhachkala. *Ethnicities*, 20(4): 708-730.

Keane W (2016) *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kefeli A (2011) The Tale of Joseph and Zulaykha on the Volga Frontier: The Struggle for Gender, Religious, and National Identity in Imperial and Postrevolutionary Russia. *Slavic Review* 70(2), 373-398.

Kirby B (2021) Thickening agents: modelling urban futures with Muslim commons in Dar es Salaam. In: Garbin D, Coleman S, Millington G (eds.), *Religious Urbanization and Moral Economies of Development in Africa*. London/Oxford: Bloomsbury.

Knox H (2017) Affective Infrastructures and the Political Imagination. *Public Culture* 29(2), 363-384.

Kuran T (1996) The discontents of Islamic economic morality. *American Economic Review* 86: 438-442.

Laidlaw J (1995) *Riches and Renunciation: Religion, Economy, and Society Among the Jain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Laidlaw J (2014) *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Lambek M (2010) *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Lambek M (2015) Living as if it mattered. In Lambek M, Das V, Fassin D, Keane W, *Four Lectures on Ethics: Anthropological Perspectives* (5-52). Chicago: Hau Books.

Larkin B (2013) The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, 327-343.

Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leezienberg M (2012) The Structural Transformation of the Coffeehouse: Religion, Language, and the Public Sphere in the Modernizing Muslim World. In Houtman D and Meyer B (eds.), *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (267-282). New York: Fordham University Press.

Lever J and Anil H (2016) From an Implicit to an Explicit Understanding: New Definitions of Halal in Turkey. In: Bergeaud-Blackler F, Fischer J and Lever j (eds.) *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics and Markets in Global Perspective* (38-54), London/New York: Routledge.

Mahmood S (2012 [2005]) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mattingly C, Dyring R, Louw M and Schwarz Wentzer T (eds.) (2018) *Moral Engines: Exploring the Ethical Drives in Human Life*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Mauss M (2002 [1925]) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Society*. London/New York: Routledge.

Montgomery D (2016) *Practicing Islam: Knowledge, Experience, and Social Navigation in Kyrgyzstan*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Morris R and Leonard D (2017) *The Returns of Fetishisms: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pelkmans M (2017) *Fragile Convictions: Changing Ideological Landscapes in Urban Kyrgyzstan*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press.

Pew Research Center (2013) *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*. Washington (DC): Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Rabinow P (1995 [1989]) *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

Rabinow P (2003) *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Rappaport R (1977) *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Rasanayagam J (2011) *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Reinhardt B (2016) "Don't make it a doctrine": Material religion, transcendence, critique. *Anthropological Theory* 16(1), 75-97.

Rogers D (2009) *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press.

Rudnyckyj D (2009) *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.

Rudnyckyj D (2019) *Beyond Debt: Islamic Experiments in Global Finance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schielke S (2015) *Egypt in the Future Tense: Hope, Frustration and Ambivalence before and after 2011*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Serrano S (2020) Bacon or Beef? 'Fake' Halal Scandals in the Russian Federation: Consolidating Halal Norms Through Secular Courts. *Sociology of Islam* 8(3-4): 387-408.

Simone A (2004) People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture* 16(3): 407–429.

Simone A (2016) Infrastructure as Instigation. In: Venkatesan S, Bear L, Harvey P, Lazar S, Rival L, and Simone A. Attention to infrastructure offers a welcome reconfiguration of anthropological approaches to the political, *Critique of Anthropology* (GDAT Meeting).

Sloterdijk P (2013) *You Must Change Your Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Star SL (1999) The Ethnography of Infrastructure. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43(3), 377-391.

Throop J (2014) Moral Moods. *Ethos* 42(1), 65-83.

Tiqqun (2011) *This is not a Program*. London/Cambridge: Semiotext(e).

Tobin S (2016) *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.

Venkatesan S, Bear L, Harvey P, Lazar S, Rival L and Simone A. (2016) Attention to infrastructure offers a welcome reconfiguration of anthropological approaches to the political, *Critique of Anthropology* (GDAT Meeting).

Weber M (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University

of California Press.

Weber M (2005 [1930]) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London/New York:

Routledge.

Yakin A Christians LL (eds.) (2021) *Rethinking Halal: Genealogy, Current Trends, and New

Interpretations*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Zigon J (2017) Attunement: Rethinking Responsibility. In Trnka S and Trundle C (eds.), *Competing

Responsibilities: The Politics and Ethics of Contemporary Life* (48-68), Durham/London: Duke

University Press.

Zigon J (2018) *Disappointment: Toward a Critical Hermeneutics of Worldbuilding*. New York:

Fordham University Press.

Zigon J (2019) *A War on People: Drug User Politics and a New Ethics of Community*. Oakland:

University of California Press.

---

[i] There are, of course, exceptions: for example, Leezemberg's reflections (2012) on coffee houses in Muslim settings are included in Houtman and Meyer's classic edited volume on religion and the question of materiality, among more sacred-oriented contributions.

[ii] Many forms of spirituality do not emphasise self-cultivation. It is therefore all the more important to investigate *askesis* in its own terms, especially as our historical phase is characterised by a surge in ethical projects (Sloterdijk, 2013; Reinhardt, 2016).

[iii] Due to space concerns, in this article I do not explore the details of Tatarstan's halal economy in its transactional dimension. I have discussed the issue elsewhere (Benussi, 2021a, 2021b).

[iv] Also see Benussi, 2020, 2021a.

[v] In Russia's illiberal regime, indigenous Islamic discourses are influenced by 'external' constraints: *sharia* talk, for instance, risks being met with hostility from state authorities (Benussi, 2020) and this might be one of the factors why this term does not feature more prominently in the public sphere (while remaining, of course, a tremendously important concept for pietists, cf. Bekkin, 2015). However, the discursive intensity of halalness in Tatarstan suggests that the currency of this category is not merely the outcome of outside interference, but the result of its resonance with the existential priorities of grassroots pietists. Halal is for many Tatarstani Muslims a particularly ethically generative *fiqhi* category. This observation invites comparison with anthropological studies that revealed the extent to which secularism 'regimented' *fiqhi* concepts and styles of reasoning away from their original ethical-moral domain and into the framework of the state's positive law (Agrama, 2012; Hallaq, 2013). Unlike those studies, my main focus here is on a self-chosen and autonomously applied rule for living rather than on sovereign/positive law. The term *halal*, in this sense, owes its success in part to its ability to capture Islam-as-rule. By contrast, *sharia*, with its legalistic overtones, remains somewhat confined to a domain of jurisprudence and sovereignty that not all religionists have equal access to and that, in Russia, is subject to fundamental political conditionings.

[vi] The historical record suggests that in late-Imperial times, attention to ritual proscriptions was periodically rekindled by millenarian reform movements (Kefeli, 2014). Still, some Tatar Muslims had surprising (by contemporary standards) attitudes to food and permissibility. We have reports of Tatars who would refuse fish as a 'Christian' food (fish was associated with the Russians), even though fish is Islamically permissible, and others who would only consume ritually slaughtered meat, but wash it down it with alcohol (Gabdrafikova, 2013).

[vii] Of course, an ascetical/cultivational dimension is *aborigine* inherent in Islam, and it is impossible to imagine Islam-as-*askesis* in isolation from other modalities of inhabiting the faith: we would be hard-pressed to draw clear-cut lines between cultivational Islam and, say, mysticism, devotionalism, identity, cultural heritage, etc. (which does not mean that some people are not invested in drawing those lines, but that is a different story). However, post-Soviet modernity has massified an ethicised approach to Islam beyond the niche of 'professionals' of piety.

[viii] Saudi women have only been allowed to ride bikes since 2013, and the practice is far from universally accepted. The Iranian authorities recently declared cycling haram for women (Bezhan, 2019).

[ix] While terminological debates are still ongoing, it is reasonably safe to say that the phenomenologists have tended to embrace a framework based on *morality* in studying 'ordinary' if existentially fraught life settings, while anthropologists of piety have often adopted the Foucauldian terminology of *ethics* framed as a site of intense, even 'extraordinary' effort toward salvation (Fadil and Fernando, 2015). Given this article's ethnographic focus on Muslims' *askesis*, the latter framework applies.

[x] An anthropological appraisal of this kind of materially-mediated institutional subject-formation processes can be found in Zigon's study of harm-reduction centres – their very architecture, the equipment they contain, their position in the urban landscape – in the context of the 'war on drugs', where they are meant to operate as top-down 'responsibilising' apparatuses (2017, 2018, 2019).

[xi] Matthew Engelke (2012) has proposed the term 'ambient faith' to describe phenomena such as the efforts made by British Christians to infuse urban spaces with spirituality through religiously themed decorations, or the practice of holding Bible advocacy meetings in cafes and pubs. In Benussi, 2021a, I have touched upon the atmospheric dimension of 'pietaskscapes'.

[xii] My interlocutor's words may contain a dollop of Tatar ethnocentrism and scripturalist haughtiness vis-à-vis the 'vernacular' devotions associated with Central Asia's folk Sufism. On the other hand, Tatar Inner Russia has long been a hub of Islamic scripturalism for the entire Central Eurasian space, and a recent survey suggests that Russian Muslims (the survey does not differentiate between Inner Russia and the Caucasus) have in some respects a greater attachment to *sharia* than their co-religionists in Central Asian countries (Pew Research Center, 2013: 42 and *passim*).